

Child Care and Development Fund

ACF-901 Provider-Level File Format and Transmission

*Technical Bulletin #15 – Draft pending OMB approval of ACF-901 form
December 2021*

I. Introduction

The ACF-901 is a new data collection form designed to collect American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Stabilization Grants provider-level data. The ARP Act of 2021 included approximately \$24 billion in funding for child care stabilization grants. State and territory lead agencies must spend at least 90 percent of the stabilization funds as grants to qualified child care providers to support the stability of the child care sector during and after the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency. Data collection efforts through the new ACF-901 will include child care provider-level information about the number and characteristics of child care providers receiving stabilization grant awards. This data collection effort is necessary to provide transparency and accountability in the use of this funding for the expansions of and improvements for child care.

This Technical Bulletin describes the formatting and transmission requirements for the ACF-901 data submission file. These formatting and transmission guidelines should be followed by all states and territories when creating the file for electronic submission to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). All questions about the file format should be directed to the Child Care Automated Reporting System (CARS) team.

Note: Refer to [Technical Bulletin #16](#) for information on the ACF-901 data standards.

When submitting the required quarterly ACF-901 report, states and territories must report the complete population of providers receiving ARP Act stabilization grants during the quarter and must adhere to the guidelines in this bulletin. Quarterly data are due 30 days after the end of each quarter (for example, the report for grants awarded from October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021 is due by January 30, 2022).

The remainder of this document contains five sections:

- Section II offers an overview of the ACF-901 report format;
- Section III gives detailed guidance for formatting the summary and location-specific provider-level records;
- Section IV provides guidance for states/territories that may be unable to submit data in a variable record length;
- Section V provides guidance on CARS file transmission; and
- Section VI provides resources for additional assistance.

NOTE: *The data examples presented in the subsequent sections represent fake data for illustration purposes only.*

II. ACF-901 File Format Overview

Contents of the ACF-901 Data Submission

The data submission is made up of four types of records:

1. Header record
2. Provider characteristics records
3. Award characteristics records
4. Footnotes

The data are submitted in a flat file with variable length records (or fixed length as discussed in Section IV) via the CARS. Refer to Section V for additional information on the submission process.

Order of Records in the ACF-901 Data Submission

The order of records in the quarterly file should be:

1. Quarterly summary record
2. Provider and Award characteristics records for providers receiving stabilization awards during the quarter
3. Footnotes relevant to the quarter's data
4. The "&" file delimiter indicating the end of the data submission

States and territories are encouraged to submit footnotes to explain particular issues with the data. Footnotes should not exceed 1,000 characters and should be reviewed and updated, as appropriate, for each quarterly file submission.

III. Guidance for Formatting ACF-901 Records

This section provides general information about record and file delimiters, and includes detailed guidance for formatting the four types of records:

- Header record
- Provider characteristics records
- Award characteristics records
- Footnotes

Summary of Record and File Delimiters

The records in the ACF-901 data submission can be of varying lengths. The file delimiters are used to:

1. Identify related groups of data or individual data elements;
2. Mark the end of records; and
3. Determine the length of the file in order to verify that all data the state/territory intended to transmit were received.

The following table describes all the delimiters that are used in the ACF-901 data submission. Note that italicized characters (*H*, *#*, *P*, *A*, *\$*, *N*, *%%*, *&*) are literals – the character as it appears should be included in the file.

| Delimiter | Use |
|------------------|--|
| <i>H</i> | This is the first character in the file. It signals that a header record follows. |
| <i>#</i> | Identifies state/territory data elements in the header record. |
| <i>P</i> | Identifies the ACF-901 provider characteristics data. |
| <i>A</i> | Identifies the ACF-901 award characteristics data. |
| <i>\$</i> | Marks the end of a quarterly summary record or the complete provider and award(s) record for one provider. |
| <i>N</i> | Marks the beginning of a footnote. |
| <i>%%</i> | Marks the end of a footnote. |
| <i>&</i> | Marks the end of the data submission file. Only one "&" is included with each submission. |

Header Record

Each quarterly ACF-901 data report begins with a record identifying the reporting period and other general administrative information.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length | Comment |
|--|--------------------|---------------|---|
| Delimiter | <i>H</i> | 1 | This delimiter identifies the following record as a quarterly summary record and is the first character in the file. |
| 01: Start of Reporting Period | YYYYMMDD | 8 | This data element identifies the date of the start of the reporting period. For example, if the report covers October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, this element would be "20211001". |
| Delimiter | <i>#</i> | 1 | Identifies the following data as header information. |
| 02: End of Reporting Period | YYYYMMDD | 8 | This data element identifies the date of the end of the reporting period. For example, if the report covers October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, this element would be "20211231". |
| Delimiter | <i>#</i> | 1 | Identifies the following data as number of providers information. |
| 03: Total Number of Providers Included | Number | 7 | The number of providers in this quarterly report. The number should be right-justified within the field and padded with leading zeros. For example, 2,387 would be formatted as "0002387". |
| Delimiter | <i>#</i> | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (first name) information. |
| 4a: State/Territory Contact – First Name | Character | 50 | The first name of the person who should be contacted regarding questions related to the report, and who is designated to receive the assessment reports. Do not include unnecessary descriptive prefixes or suffixes. |
| Delimiter | <i>#</i> | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (middle name) information. |

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length | Comment |
|--|--------------------|---------------|--|
| 4b: State/Territory Contact – Middle Name | Character | 50 | The middle name of the person who should be contacted regarding questions related to the report, and who is designated to receive the assessment reports. |
| Delimiter | # | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (last name) information. |
| 4c: State/Territory Contact – Last Name | Character | 50 | The last name of the person who should be contacted regarding questions related to the report, and who is designated to receive the assessment reports. Do not include unnecessary descriptive prefixes or suffixes. |
| Delimiter | # | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (phone number) information. |
| 5a: State/Territory Contact Telephone Number | Character | 20 | The telephone number of the state/territory child care contact. |
| Delimiter | # | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (phone type) information. |
| 5b: State/Territory Contact Phone Type | Number | 1 | Indicates whether the phone number provided is a work phone (1) or mobile phone (2) |
| Delimiter | # | 1 | Identifies the following data as contact (email address) information. |
| 06: State/Territory Contact E-mail Address | Character | 50 | The valid e-mail address of the state/territory child care contact. |
| Record Delimiter | \$ | 1 | This delimiter indicates the end of the header record. |

The delimiters, reporting period, provider counts, and contact information are required. However, if the state/territory does not have certain contact information, such as a phone number, the field may be skipped, although all delimiters should be included. For example, below is a quarterly summary record containing the following data:

Start of Reporting Period: October 1, 2021
 End of Reporting Period: December 31, 2021
 Total Number of Providers Included: 3,000
 Contact Name: Jane Ann Smith
 Contact Phone Number: (703) 555-1234
 Phone Type: Work
 Contact E-mail: jsmith@dhr.anystate.us

The header summary record is formatted as follows (delimiters are in **bold**):

H20211001#20211231#0003000#Jane#Ann#Smith#(703) 555-1234#1#jsmith@dhr.anystate.us\$

However, if the state/territory does not have an available phone number, the formatted record will look like this (note the three # delimiters together, indicating that no phone number and no phone type are included):

H20211001#20211231#0003000#Jane#Ann#Smith###jsmith@dhr.anystate.us\$

Provider Characteristics Records

The header record is immediately followed by the records on providers receiving awards and award information. Each provider should have a unique ID (data element #7) or FEIN (data element #8). If a provider operates in multiple locations, each location that received an award during the quarter should be included and assigned a unique provider ID (the same FEIN should not be used for each different location). Each record contains:

1. Provider characteristics data: information which applies to the provider that received the stabilization grant award; and
2. Award characteristics data: information on each grant award received by the provider during the quarter.

The format for provider data will be the same for each record. A “P” delimiter is placed before each provider’s data to identify the information. Positions 1 through 65 will always contain provider data and associated delimiters, as detailed in the following table:

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|--|-------------|--------|
| Delimiter identifying Provider data | <i>P</i> | 1 |
| 07: Provider Unique State ID | Character | 15 |
| 08: Provider Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) | Number | 9 |
| 09: Provider type | Number | 1 |
| 10: Provider County FIPS Code | Number | 5 |
| 11: Provider Zip Code | Number | 5 |
| 12: Gender | Number | 1 |
| 13: Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity | Number | 1 |

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|--|--------------------|---------------|
| 14: American Indian or Alaskan Native | Number | 1 |
| 15: Asian | Number | 1 |
| 16: Black or African American | Number | 1 |
| 17: Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | Number | 1 |
| 18: White | Number | 1 |
| 19: Total licensed or identified capacity | Number | 4 |
| 20: Infant licensed or identified capacity | Number | 4 |
| 21: Toddler licensed or identified capacity | Number | 4 |
| 22: Preschooler licensed or identified capacity | Number | 4 |
| 23: School-age children licensed or identified capacity | Number | 4 |
| 24: Serving children who receive subsidy, at time of application | Number | 1 |
| 25: Provider temporarily closed at time of application | Number | 1 |

Award Characteristics Records

The format for Award data may differ from record to record, depending on the number of awards received during the quarter by each unique provider. These data always begin at record position 66 and continue until all of the information for each award received during the quarter is recorded.

Delimiters are also used to identify Award data. “A” precedes each string of Award data. Additional awards for each unique provider follow the same format, each starting with an “A”. The format is repeated for each award received by the provider. Finally, a “\$” delimiter is placed after the last award data to mark the end of the provider’s record. The following table gives the details of this format.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Delimiter identifying Award data | A | 1 |
| 26: Award amount (<i>rounded to the nearest dollar</i>) | Number | 7 |
| 27: Date of award | YYYYMMDD | 8 |
| 28: Personnel Costs | Number | 1 |
| 29: Rent/Mortgage/Utilities | Number | 1 |
| 30: Personal protective equipment | Number | 1 |
| 31: Purchases of or updates to equipment and supplies | Number | 1 |
| 32: Goods and services | Number | 1 |
| 33: Mental health supports | Number | 1 |

If second award was received by the provider location, add information for second award.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Delimiter identifying Award data | A | 1 |
| 26: Award Amount (<i>rounded to the nearest dollar</i>) | Number | 7 |
| 27: Award Date | YYYYMMDD | 8 |
| 28: Personnel Costs | Number | 1 |
| 29: Rent/Mortgage/Utilities | Number | 1 |
| 30: Personal protective equipment | Number | 1 |
| 31: Purchases of or updates to equipment and supplies | Number | 1 |
| 32: Goods and services | Number | 1 |
| 33: Mental health supports | Number | 1 |

If third award was received by the provider location, add information for third award.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Delimiter identifying Award data | <i>A</i> | 1 |
| 26: Award amount (<i>rounded to the nearest dollar</i>) | Number | 7 |
| 27: Date of Award | YYYYMMDD | 8 |
| 28: Personnel Costs | Number | 1 |
| 29: Rent/Mortgage/Utilities | Number | 1 |
| 30: Personal protective equipment | Number | 1 |
| 31: Purchases of or updates to equipment and supplies | Number | 1 |
| 32: Goods and services | Number | 1 |
| 33: Mental health supports | Number | 1 |

Repeat for each additional award received during the quarter for the location-specific provider.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Delimiter indicating the end of provider's entire data record | <i>\$</i> | 1 |

This format is repeated for each provider/award combination for the quarter.

Footnotes

The last submitted record for providers receiving an award is followed by footnotes for the quarter. States/territories should provide footnotes to explain anomalous data for any elements or to provide context as to why the quarterly file contains particular information. For example, if a state included a small number of providers who received a stabilization grant award in the quarterly file, the state can include a footnote to indicate that the state began administering their stabilization grant award program after a specific date during the quarter.

| Data Element Description | Data Format | Length | Comment |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---|
| Delimiter identifying footnote | <i>N</i> | 1 | This delimiter identifies the following record as a footnote. |
| Footnote Reference | Number | 2 | This references the data element for which the state/territory is submitting an explanation. It can range from '07' for the first data element in the ACF-901 (Provider Unique State ID) to '33' for the last data element (Mental health supports). States can also submit footnotes that refer to the whole file. In this case, the reference is '00'. |
| Footnote Body | Character | 1000 characters | The text of the state/territory remarks. |
| Record Delimiter | <i>%%</i> | 2 | These characters indicate the end of a footnote record. |

The following is an example of a correctly formatted footnote (delimiters are in **bold**):

N27 All award dates are after November 23, 2021, as the state implemented its stabilization grant program in November 2021.**%%**

End of the data submission file

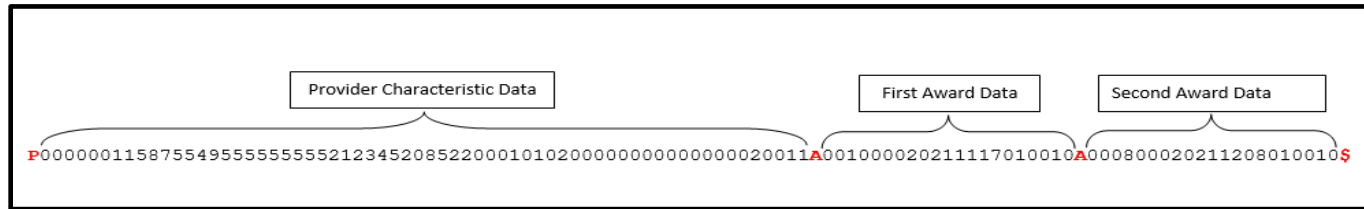
After the last footnote delimiter (**%%**), include a delimiter (**&**) indicating the end of the data submission.

| Data Element Number/Description | Data Format | Length |
|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Delimiter marking the end of the data submission file. Only one "&" is included with each submission. | & | 1 |

Examples of Provider/Award Record and Variable File Layout

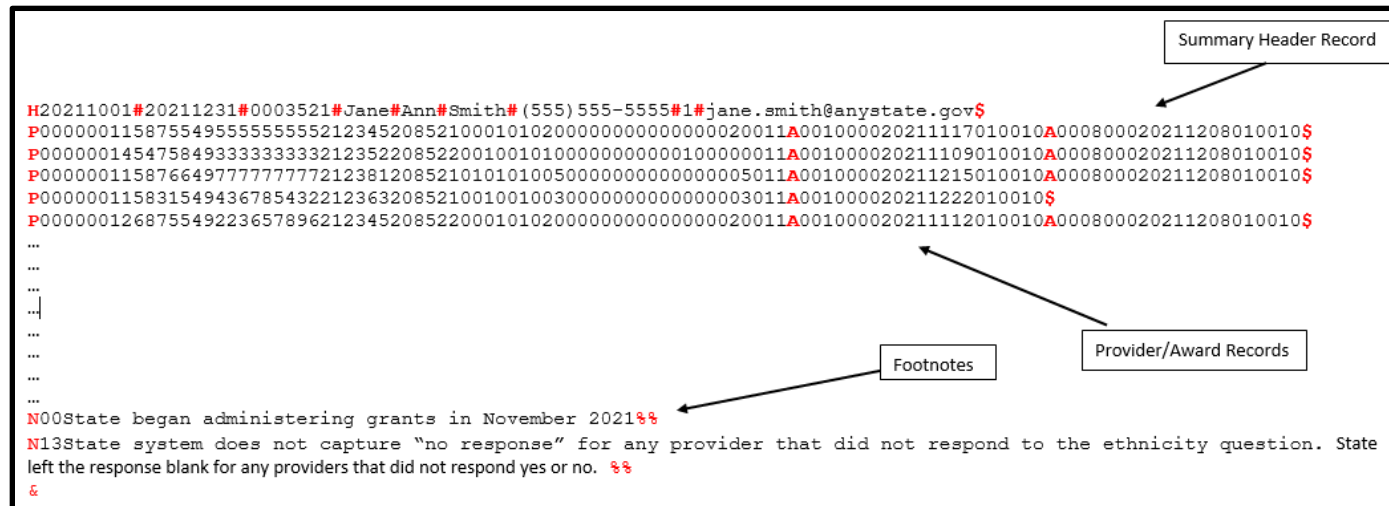
Example 1: In this example, the provider received 2 awards during the quarter (delimiters are in **bold red text**):

Example of a Provider/Award Record



Example 2: Below is an example of the variable layout of the entire ACF-901 file. The state included 3,521 providers in the file this quarter. The Summary Record is followed by provider/award records for the quarter. Footnotes are listed last in the file and do not exceed 1,000 characters. The last character is the "&" file delimiter indicating the end of the data submission.

Example of ACF-901 Variable File Layout



General Instruction for Data Elements in Provider Records

Although the number of providers will vary in each quarterly submission, the space allocated to each group of elements (including delimiters) remains the same. The provider information is always allotted 64 positions and each award is allotted 21 positions, not including the required delimiters. One final position is allotted for the *end of record* delimiter. **If the state is missing a data element for a record, blanks should be inserted in its place.** For example, if the state is not reporting Data Element #8: Provider Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) for one provider, 9 blank spaces should be included in the record in the location reserved for #8. Likewise, if Data Element #21: Toddler licensed or identified capacity were unavailable for one provider, the state would insert four blank spaces. However, if Data Element #21: Toddler licensed or identified capacity was equal to zero (0), the state would insert four zeros (0000).

Numeric data such as counts or dollars should be right-justified in the space allocated for the element, and padded with leading zeros to fill the field. For example, Data Element #19: Total licensed or identified capacity is allocated four positions. If, for example, the total provider capacity was 300, the amount would be formatted as '0300'. This standard is also used for other elements, such as Data Element #7: Provider Unique State ID, for which the characters should be right-justified and padded with zeros to fill out the 15 spaces allocated for the element. In summary, this formatting standard applies to the following elements:

- 03: Total Number of Providers Included
- 07: Provider Unique State ID
- 19: Total licensed or identified capacity
- 20: Infant licensed or identified capacity
- 21: Toddler licensed or identified capacity
- 22: Preschooler licensed or identified capacity
- 23: School-age children licensed or identified capacity
- 26: Award amount (*rounded to the nearest dollar*)

IV. Formatting Guidance for States/Territories Unable to Submit Data in a Variable Record Length Format

Some states/territories employ software tools that will not allow child care data to be formatted in the variable length format described above. ACF gives these states/territories the option to allocate fixed fields for every submitted record and submit ACF-901 data in the alternative format described below:

1. Data must follow the formatting rules described previously in this document. Data elements must be in the same order, with the same delimiters (*H*, *#*, *P*, *A*, *\$*, *N*, *%%*, and *&*) used. See Section III for additional information about the standard delimiters.
2. The state/territory should define each provider record so that it includes:
 - space for one provider;
 - space for a maximum of 10 awards per quarter. The state/territory may allocate space for fewer than 10 awards if desired.
3. Each record should begin with the provider information, followed by the information for the first award, followed by the information for the second award. This format continues up to the 10th award (if the state/territory chooses to allocate that much space per provider). This space is allocated even if not used for a specific provider.
4. **A new delimiter, an asterisk “*”, is used instead of the usual “A” delimiter to mark all allocated but unused space for additional awards.** Unused space should be filled with blanks or zeros and be the correct length for an award (21). Note that these record lengths do not include the delimiter counts.

The following is an example of a state’s or territory’s provider record in a fixed record length. The state/territory chose to allocate 4 awards per provider:

P(64)**A**(21 characters of data for 1st award)**A**(21 characters of data for 2nd award)**A**(21 characters of data for 3rd award)**A**(21 characters of data for 4th award)**\$**

Each complete record is followed by the “\$”.

Each footnote record should end with “%%” characters. The remaining record should be filled in with blanks.

After the last footnote delimiter (%%), include a delimiter (&) indicating the end of the data submission.

Examples of ACF-901 Fixed Length Provider Record and File Layout

Example 3: In this example of a fixed file layout, the provider received 1 award during the quarter (delimiters are in **bold red text**):

Example of a Fixed Length Provider/Award Record

Fixed length Provider/Award
Record with one award


```
P00000001158315494367854322123632085210010010030000000000000003011A001000020211222010010A      A      A      $
```

Example 4: Below is an example of the fixed layout of the entire ACF-901 file. The state included 3,521 providers in the file this quarter. The Summary Record is followed by fixed length provider/award records for the quarter. The state decided to have a fixed layout for four (4) awards per provider. Footnotes are listed last in the file and do not exceed 1,000 characters. The last character is the "&" file delimiter indicating the end of the data submission.

Example of ACF-901 Fixed Length File Layout

```
H20211001#20211231#0003521#Jane#Ann#Smith#(555)555-5555#1#jane.smith@anystate.gov$
P0000000115875549555555552123452085210001010200000000000000020011A001000020211117010010A      A      A      $
P0000000145475849333333332123522085220010010100000000000000000000011A001000020211109010010A000800020211208010010A      A      $
P000000011587664977777777212381208521010101005000000000000005011A001000020211215010010A000250020211105001010A004000020211009010010A      A      $
P00000001158315494367854322123632085210010010030000000000000003011A001000020211222010010A      A      $
...
...
...
...
...
N00State began administering grants in November 2021%%
N13State system does not capture "no response" for any provider that did not respond to the ethnicity question. State
left the response blank for any providers that did not respond yes or no. %%
&
```

Footnotes

Fixed length Provider/Award
Records

V. File Type and Transmission

The ACF-901 quarterly file must be transmitted to OCC using the CARS.

- To access the CARS, a user must first register with Okta for multi-factor authentication (MFA) to verify their identity and then request a CARS account. A user must receive approval for an appropriate user role before access to CARS is granted by the Regional Office.
- Login to <https://CARS.acf.hhs.gov> with the CARS and MFA user credentials.
- Select the ACF-901 module by clicking on the ACF-901 tile and follow the filters on the screen to submit the ACF-901 quarterly file.
- Refer to the CARS Resources page at the top navigational bar for further guidance on how to submit the ACF-901 file.

VI. Resources for Additional Assistance

If you have questions or need more information about the ACF-901 report, there are two primary resources for additional help – the Office of Child Care (OCC) Regional Program Manager for program and policy questions, and the CARS team for general reporting questions.

OCC is represented by staff in each of the ten administrative regions across the country. Contact information for the **Regional Offices** can be found on the [OCC website](#).

The CARS team works with OCC to provide technical assistance to states, territories, and tribes with matters related to the required CCDF data reporting. You can reach **the CARS team** Monday through Friday from 9:00 am – 6:00 pm, prevailing Eastern Time.

Phone (toll-free): 1-877-249-9117

E-mail: CARS@gdit.com